

Holy Communion

As a community in our worship service, we gather together before God, we converse with God's Word through Scripture readings and hearing the sermon, and we begin our ministry together in our response to the Word by bearing witness to our faith (the Creed), praying for one another's needs (the Prayers of the People), and doing acts of love (the Offering). And now that we are about ready to depart in order to go back into our daily lives, we receive the very presence of Christ in our lives through Holy Communion.

The Lutheran Church upholds two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. A sacrament is where we encounter the very presence of Christ and Christ enters into our lives. We begin our life of faith in Christ through Holy Baptism where Jesus is immersed into the very fabric of our lives and we are both adopted and reborn as children of God. Since our Christian identity is once and for all, we receive baptism only once in our lives and live it for all eternity. Holy Communion is when we gather together as a community to be reconnected with Christ in our lives through the eating and drinking of bread and wine.

In the sacraments, Jesus' body and blood are "in, with, and under" the bread and wine (as stated in Luther's Small Catechism). And when we receive it, Jesus is present "in, with and under" our very lives as we go out into the world and bear witness and serve him.

While the offering is received, the pastor prepares the altar table for Holy Communion by uncovering the elements. So while we are receiving the offerings of the community in the name of God, we are also beginning to receive God's own Son whom God offered up for our salvation.

Then the congregation begins the Great Thanksgiving. In most congregations, the Great Thanksgiving begins with a formal dialogue between the officiant (usually the pastor) and the congregation.

Officiant: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

Officiant: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them to the Lord.

Officiant: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

Congregation: It is right to give thanks and praise.

After this formal agreement among the community, the officiant prays a prayer thanking God for the salvation that Jesus brings through his death and resurrection and asks for that salvation to come to us. And the officiant asks that the Holy Spirit may come among us to make Christ known.

After the prayer, the congregation responds by singing “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Power and Might”. The words of this song come from both Revelation 4:8 (the song of the cherubim praising God) and from Mark 11:9-10 (the praise of Jesus entering Jerusalem).

After giving thanks and praising God, the Words of Institution are either read or recited. These are the words of Jesus instituting the bread and wine as his body and blood. The Words of Institution used in the Lutheran liturgy come straight out of Luke 22:19-20. Some churches prefer using the Words of Institution in 1 Corinthians 23-26.

In some traditions after the Words of Institution are said, the leader consecrates the elements by lifting up the bread saying, “This is the body of Christ,” and then lifting up the chalice saying, “This is the blood of Christ.” But not all pastors do this – like myself – because Jesus already pretty much said that in the Words of Institution.

After this, Holy Communion is distributed in the worshipping community.

After the people receive the sacrament, a blessing is given. In some churches, communion is received by ‘tables’ of people kneeling at the altar and each ‘table’ receives a blessing before they leave the altar area. In most congregations, the blessing is given after everyone had received the sacrament. The blessing that we use is “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the gifts of his body and blood strengthen, keep, and unit us, now and forever. Amen.”

After this, the community prays to give thanks for the sacrament and blessings received. This is called the Post-Communion Prayer.

After the prayer, the congregation breaks into a song of praise. We use the song, “Thank the Lord and Sing His Praise”. Again, we are praising God for the presence of Jesus in our lives in whom we have salvation.

Close with the Post-Communion Prayer for Epiphany:

Christ Jesus, at this table we have feasted on your very life and are strengthened for our journey. Send us forth from this banquet nourished in body and spirit to proclaim your good news and serve others in your name. Amen.